

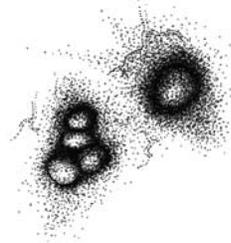
Warts, Fibromas, Warbles, and Tapeworms in Ohio Cottontail

RABBITS



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WARTS AND FIBROMAS



Two of the most common ailments of Ohio cottontails are rabbit warts and fibromas. These skin disorders are caused by viruses transmitted by biting insects such as fleas, mosquitoes, and ticks.

Warts are horny protrusions on the skin of the neck, shoulders, ears, or abdomen. Fibromas are firm, fibrous tumors usually on the skin of the feet, nose, eyelids, lips, ears, and back. Neither ailment causes harm to the rabbit, and both typically regress within several months. However, warts can occasionally become cancerous to the rabbit. Fibromas are most common in young rabbits during late summer, fall, and early winter. Rabbit fibromas can be contagious to other wild rabbits.

Rabbit warts and fibromas are no threat to people. An infected cottontail can be handled, skinned, cooked, and eaten without concern. The growths affect only the skin and a pelted carcass will show no signs of either ailment on the tissues of the body.

WARBLES

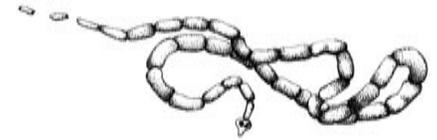


Ohio hunters might encounter large grubs living beneath a cottontail's skin, usually around the legs or neck. These are warbles, the larval stage of a large fly (3/4 inch or more in length) that looks like a small, hairy bumblebee, called a bot fly.

The adult female fly lays eggs at the opening of a burrow or along a rabbit trail. The eggs hatch into small larvae that enter the rabbit through a natural body opening such as its nose, mouth, or a wound in the skin. The larva then migrates to a location just under the skin of the rabbit where it maintains a breathing pore through the skin and begins to grow. The warble reaches a size of about 1.5 inches long and a half inch in diameter when mature in about 1.5-2 months. It then emerges from the rabbit's skin and falls to the ground where it pupates into an adult fly.

Because warbles are so ugly, many people think that a warble-infested rabbit is inedible. A cottontail with warbles is perfectly safe to eat. The skinned carcass usually shows little or no evidence that a warble had been living under the skin. Warbles are undoubtedly a nuisance to the rabbit that carries them. They may weaken an adult rabbit, retard the growth of a young rabbit, or make it easier for infections to enter the animal.

TAPEWORMS



Two species of canine tapeworms are known to infect cottontail rabbits. Rabbits become infected by accidentally eating the eggs of the tapeworms that are on contaminated vegetation. Tapeworm larvae hatch and migrate from the digestive tract to other areas of the body. The most common species found in cottontails, *Taenia pisiformis*, travels through the liver and appears as a sac of clear fluid containing a small white object attached to the outside of the liver, intestines, lungs, or within the body cavity. Hunters sometimes mistake these parasites as tularemia, a disease of rabbits that produces white spots on the liver. Occasionally another tapeworm species, *T. serialis*, is found under the skin and between layers of muscle and appears as fluid-filled sacs containing multiple white objects which are the heads of the immature tapeworms.

Heavy infections of tapeworms can cause liver damage, slowed growth, an enlarged abdomen, and can hinder the movement of infected rabbits, making them more vulnerable to predation. The tapeworm larvae do not mature in rabbits but are passed to dogs, cats, and other wild canines (foxes and coyotes) when the rabbit is eaten by those carnivores. The larvae then mature into adult tapeworms that lay eggs which are passed out of the body in the animal's feces.

The meat of tapeworm-infected rabbits can be safely cleaned and eaten. The parasites are generally removed during cleaning and any that remain would be destroyed when cooking the meat. Rabbits should always be well cooked as a general precaution. Hunters should not feed rabbit carcasses or entrails to dogs, cats, or any other pets. Dogs and cats are easily infected with these worms.